

systems to newer, higher-order systems as an individual's existential problems change. Each successive stage, wave, or level of existence is a state through which people pass on their way to other states of being. When the human is centralized in one state of existence, he or she has a psychology which is particular to that state. His or her feelings, motivations, ethics and values, biochemistry, degree of neurological activation, learning system, belief systems, conception of mental health, ideas as to what mental illness is and how it should be treated, conceptions of and preferences for management, education, economics, and political theory and practice are all appropriate to that state."⁴

Graves outlined around eight major "levels or waves of human existence," as we will see in a moment. But it should be remembered that virtually all of these stage conceptions—from Abraham Maslow to Jane Loevinger to Robert Kegan to Clare Graves—are based on extensive amounts of research and data. These are not simply conceptual ideas and pet theories, but are grounded at every point in a considerable amount of carefully checked evidence. Many of the stage models, in fact, have been carefully checked in first-, second-, and third-world countries.⁵ The same is true with Graves's model; to date, it has been tested in more than fifty thousand people from around the world, and there have been no major exceptions found to the general scheme.⁶

Of course, this does not mean that any of these schemes gives the whole story, or even most of it. They are all simply partial snapshots of the great River of Life, and they are all useful when looking at the River from that particular angle. This does not prevent other pictures from being equally useful, nor does it mean that these pictures cannot be refined with further study. *What it does mean is that any attempt to understand humanity's struggle to reach an integral embrace ought to take these studies into account.*

THE HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS PROJECT

These studies, in fact, appear to be a crucial part of any genuine Theory of Everything. If we are going to include the physical, biological, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of existence, then this important research offers us a more generous overview of the many possibilities of the psychological dimension.

In a sense, this research is the psychological correlate of the Human Genome Project, which involves the scientific mapping of all of the genes in human DNA. Just so, this overall psychological research—this Human Consciousness Project—is a cross-cultural mapping of all of the states, structures, memes, types, levels, stages, and waves of human consciousness.⁷ This overall map, as we will see, then becomes the psychological component of a possible Theory of Everything, where it will be supplemented with findings from the physical, biological, cultural, and spiritual dimensions. And, we will also see, this psychological map will help us to understand some of the many obstacles that make it hard for individuals to appreciate a more integral vision of their own possibilities.

We return, then, to Clare Graves's work, which has been carried forward and refined by Don Beck and Christopher Cowan in an approach they call Spiral Dynamics.⁸ Far from being mere armchair analysts, Beck and Cowan were participants in the discussions that led to the end of apartheid in South Africa. The principles of Spiral Dynamics have been fruitfully used to reorganize businesses, revitalize townships, overhaul education systems, and defuse inner-city tensions.

Spiral Dynamics sees human development as proceeding through eight general stages, which are also called *memes* (see fig. 1-1). "Meme" is a word that is used a lot nowadays, with many different and conflicting meanings—and many critics say the word has no meaning at all.⁹ But for Spiral Dynamics, a meme is simply *a basic stage of development that can be expressed in any activity* (we will see many examples of this as we proceed). Beck and Cowan affirm that memes (or stages) are not rigid levels but flowing waves, with much overlap and interweaving, resulting in a meshwork or dynamic spiral of consciousness unfolding. As Beck puts it, "The Spiral is messy, not symmetrical, with multiple admixtures rather than pure types. These are mosaics, meshes, and blends."¹⁰

Beck and Cowan use various names and colors to refer to these different memes or waves of existence. The use of colors almost always puts people off, at first. But Beck and Cowan often work in racially charged areas, and they have found that it helps to take peoples' minds off of skin color and focus on the "color of the meme" instead of the "color of the skin." Moreover, as much research has continued to confirm, *each and every individual has all of these memes potentially available to them.* And therefore the lines of social